



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., presents summer State of the Navajo Nation address

*Ariz. Gov. Napolitano, Utah Gov. Huntsman, Ariz. AG Terry Goddard, Apache County Sheriff Brian Hounshell, new Navajo Board of Education among guests in the gallery*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and his wife First Lady Vikki Shirley welcomed the governors of Arizona and Utah to the Navajo capital today for the start of the summer session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council.

Both Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano and Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman addressed the Council individually and also met privately with President and Mrs. Shirley. The four walked to the Navajo Veterans Memorial Park in front of the President's office to have photos taken in front of the huge stone arch known as Window Rock. President Shirley met with Gov. Huntsman in his office on Thursday in Salt Lake City. Also attending the session was Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard.

In his summer State of the Navajo Nation address, the President outlined steps his Administration has taken to improve the Navajo Head Start program, said resumption of its federal funding was imminent, encouraged the Navajo Nation Council to approve an agreement to end a 40-year-old land dispute with the Hopi Tribe and expressed his disappointment that two of the three members of the Apache County Board of Supervisors voted to remove Sheriff Brian Hounshell.

Earlier, dozens of horseback riders arrived from their annual ride to the council following week-long journeys across the Navajo Nation. This year they were led from the west by Navajo Mountain, Utah, Council Delegate Willie Greyeyes and, from the east by Sanostee, N.M., Council Delegate Jerry Bodie.

The President also introduced four members of the new Navajo Nation Board of Education; Board Vice Chairman



*Ariz. Gov. Janet Napolitano greets Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman outside Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., office in Window Rock. Both governors presented reports on the opening day of the summer session of the Navajo Nation Council.*

Phillip Bluehouse, Vice Chairperson Rebecca Benally, and members Marjorie Dodge and Vee Browne.

Regarding the Head Start program, President Shirley said continual federal and tribal background checks will require electronic fingerprinting devices for the program to do the job properly. He said the Nation will need to enter into agreements with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to obtain the required criminal background check information in a timely manner. Funding for the Early Head Start program resumed May 17.

"The summary suspension of federal funds to the Head Start Program is an extremely serious situation," the President said. "We are also working hard to ensure that our young children will be in the safest and healthiest learning environment possible."

Efforts to correct program deficiencies include a Corrective Action Plan that addresses concerns raised by the federal Administration for Children and Families. This is to ensure that the programs operate only with staff that have provided the required declarations and who have undergone appropriate background checks and assessments.

"I directed accelerated efforts involving all necessary Navajo Nation departments and programs to ensure that the health and safety of children enrolled in the Nation's Head Start and Early Head Start Programs is protected," President Shirley told the Council.

On May 7, the President issued an executive order to implement interim Policies and Procedures for Background Checks and Employee Assessments. He said those policies will serve as the official process until the Parent Policy Council, the new Navajo Nation Board of Education and the Education Committee approve them to conduct

background checks and assessments. He said an emergency assignment was issued to the Nation's Division of Public Safety to direct the completion of tribal background checks on all current Head Start program employees.

In addition, to ensure proper implementation of the Corrective Action Plan and Executive Order, a task force was created which includes Navajo Attorney General Louis Denetsosie, Education Division Director Leland Leonard, Division of Public Safety Director Samson Cowboy, Deputy Director for Human Resources Andre' Cordero and Controller Mark Grant.

The President said that last week he signed historic Navajo Business Site Leasing Regulations which removes the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the process. He and the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Michael D. Olsen signed the regulations in Washington, D.C.

"The Navajo Nation will finally be able to streamline the process for issuing a business site lease," he said. "No longer will the Nation be required to seek final approval from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to develop our own lands, nor will we be required to wait up to four years for the federal government to conduct appraisals."

He said the requirement for a federal action is now eliminated. This should result in improving economic growth and development, he said. It is now up to the Navajo Division of Economic Development to conduct the land appraisals, he added. He said chapters that are governance-certified and



*Ariz. Gov. Janet Napolitano, Navajo First Lady Vikki Shirley, President Shirley and Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman before the Window Rock at the Navajo Veterans Memorial Park.*

have an approved certified land-use plan will be able to issue business site leases in accordance with the regulations.

Regarding an agreement to lift the 40-year-old Bennett Freeze in the western Navajo Nation, the President said the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe reached an intergovernmental compact that would end litigation, lift the freeze on construction and development and end the "misery and hardship this cruel directive has wrought

on our citizens, turning them into the poorest of the poor on Navajoland, refugees in

their own homes."

The Bennett Freeze resulted from a July 8, 1966, administrative order by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert L. Bennett. The order "plunged 1.5 million acres of the western Navajo Nation into darkness," President Shirley said.

Construction, improvements and all development came to a stand-still and has remained largely in effect to this day, affecting thousands of Navajos.

"Now, after two generations of our people suffering under this burden, our Nation and the Hopi Tribe, talking together, have found a way to end the misery, end the litigation, end the differences, and thaw out the freeze forever," President Shirley



*President Shirley presents his State of the Nation address to the summer session of the Navajo Nation Council.*

"The purchase of land is an exercise of sovereignty and strengthens our jurisdiction in those areas."

The other legislation he opposes is the proposed Fairness in Appropriations Act of 2006. This bill would statutorily establish percentage-based budget allocations for the three branches of government. He said the bill does not include fixed costs and undermines the authority of the Budget and Finance Committee and the branch chiefs to negotiate the branch allocation percentages.

"I am not opposed to and, in fact, support a fair allocation among the branches," he said. "But to statutorily set the Executive Branch allocation at a percentage lower than what it traditionally receives, while increasing the Judicial and Legislative Branch allocations, with no budget impact analysis, is senseless. I vetoed similar legislation before."

said. "This compact requires no loss of land, no relocation from homes, no further expense, but offers both Navajos and Hopis a way to continue their religious practices in areas they've always considered traditional."

The intergovernmental compact amicably grants both nations what each has long sought, he said. Since 2002, negotiators for the tribes have worked on this compact, reaching an agreement in January. On June 9, the solicitor for the U.S. Department of Interior concurred.

The compact would remove a prohibition to bring in water, electricity and transportation services to a 800,000-acre area. Once the Navajo Nation Council and Hopi Tribal Council approve the compact, he said, it goes to the U.S. Interior Secretary and the Arizona District Court for final action.

The President spoke against two pieces of legislation. One would raid the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to disperse \$100,000 to each of the 110 chapters. This is the seventh attempt by the Council to gain access to this fund.

"The distribution of \$100,000 to chapters for no specific purpose is irresponsible and contrary to the intended purpose of this fund," the President said regarding the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. "The source of funding for this politically-motivated scheme is, as we all know, money set aside by law for the purchase of land."

He said the Division of Natural Resources is currently assessing several offers for land purchases.

"A worthy purchase the Nation should consider is the consolidation of land holdings in the Eastern Agency," he said.

The President said he was profoundly disappointed that two members of the Apache County Board of Supervisors – one of whom is Fort Defiance Council Delegate Tom White – voted to oust Apache County Sheriff Brian Hounshell from office. The sheriff was in the Council gallery as the President offered him his support.

"It was a sad day on Navajoland, in Apache County, in the state of Arizona, and in the United States when this happened," the President said. "With Sheriff Hounshell's removal, based solely on allegations and without proven violation of any law, it would now appear we're going backwards in Apache County instead of going forward on behalf of the people."

He said that if the decision is to stand, the county should hold elections to replace the sheriff "rather than have someone appointed to replace him who would roll back all of the progress and goodwill Sheriff Hounshell has established with the Navajo people of Apache County and throughout the Navajo Nation."

On other issues, the President said:

- He is working on is to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of the Nation's Financial Management Information System.
- The Office of First Lady has received a \$100,000 grant to teach school-aged children about the dangers of alcohol and drug use and domestic violence.
- The U.S. Department of Labor recently worked through the First Lady's office to launch a pilot project to bring 200 laptop computers and training to remote communities.